

John Cheever uses various elements of form in "The Swimmer" to create its meaning. Through this short story, Cheever implies that aging is inevitable and one often denies its coming and arrival. Using Neddy's journey through his neighbors' pools, he shows that when one experiences life-altering events, it is difficult to accept the resulting changes. Cheever suggests that a person often suppresses true events from the mind and instead, immerses oneself in more favorable falsehoods. Imagery, diction, and symbols used throughout "The Swimmer" work together to create theme.

The changes in Neddy's life are paralleled by changes in Cheever's imagery. The beginning of the story states that, "the day was lovely, and that he lived in a world so generously supplied with water seemed like a clemency, a beneficence. His heart was high and he ran across the grass" (Cheever 515). These lines create an image of a beautiful midsummer's day filled with joy. The reader pictures the line of neighbors' pools with Neddy running from one to the next. This image of life and happiness is soon replaced by one of emptiness. Neddy comes across the Welcher's house where "the pool furniture was folded, stacked, and covered with a tarpaulin. The bathhouse was locked. All the windows of the house were shut, and when he went around to the driveway in front he saw a FOR SALE sign nailed to a tree" (Cheever 518). Now the imagery shifts from that of a pleasant day to a more striking and depressing scene. Using this change, Cheever allows the reader's emotions to change as Neddy's feelings change from feelings of happiness to feelings of loneliness and disconnectedness from reality.

As imagery shifts throughout "The Swimmer", diction changes as well. Cheever chooses words such as "slenderness of youth" (514) to describe Neddy, and "intenseness of his pleasure" (514) to describe his feelings. These words from the beginning of the story are contrasted by the words Cheever uses in the end of the work. After swimming all day, Neddy's "arms were lame.

His legs felt rubbery and ached at the joints" (Cheever 520). Words such as "lame" and "ached" show Neddy's deterioration from his prior state to a weaker one. It also shows that he has aged and become less resilient over time.

Cheever uses symbols in his work to show Neddy's different stages in life, as well as his denial of aging and growing inability to face his problems. Overall, Neddy uses the water as a physical and mental barrier between him and the real world. His constant immersion in water parallels his immersion in ignorance. He uses the water to distance himself from his friends and family and the problems that he needs to face. Also, the water color of the pool directly corresponds with the stages in Neddy's life. The first pool he encounters is a pale green, symbolizing youth and inexperience. Next, he encounters a sapphire blue pool, then the murky water of the public pool, followed by the opaque gold pool of the Halloran's pool, and then the wintry gleam of the Biswanger pool. Each pool's color gets darker and farther from the green pool that he began in, showing that with each stage of his life, Neddy grew farther away from the bright memories of childhood and closer to the dark troubles of adulthood.

Cheever mentions different plants as Neddy continues on his journey through the different pools and stages. He first mentions the "flowering apple trees"(Cheever 515), which represent springtime and youth. Next, Neddy sees roses, which bloom later in the summer, showing that time has passed. The change is more drastic when Neddy notes that "the force of the wind had stripped a maple of its red and yellow leaves and scattered them over the grass and the water. Since it was midsummer the tree must be blighted and yet he felt a peculiar sadness at this sign of autumn" (Cheever 517). The fall leaves show an even greater gap in time but Neddy denies this, assuming instead that the tree is sickly. He finds another yellow tree, sees leaves falling from trees, and smells wood burning, but is unable to accept that the seasons have

changed. This lack of acceptance symbolizes that he cannot accept that he is aging and his life is changing. He remains ignorant of this truth until he realizes that the stars have changed as well.

"Looking over head he saw that the stars had come out, but why should he seem to see Andromeda, Cepheus, and Cassiopeia? What had become of the constellations of midsummer? He began to cry" (Cheever 523). His response to the realization that time has passed and things have changed shows that he attempted to deny the truth and is reluctant to accept it.

Neddy's problems are represented by the storm. When he begins in the green pool of youth, the storm remains unthreatening in the distance. After he swims through the green and sapphire pools, the storm hits. The storm symbolizes Neddy's problems that caused him to fall from his high social status. After the storm, he must cross the highway, which "he had known when he started that this was a part of his journey—it had been on his maps—but confronted with the lines of traffic worming through the summery light, he found himself unprepared" (Cheever 518). The humiliation of crossing the highway represents the humiliation he felt after he had encountered his problems and lost his money and home. He knew after making his mistake that it was "part of his journey" but was "unprepared" to face it. His unpreparedness resulted in his inability to cope and come to terms with the situation. Trough this, Cheever suggests that when a person experiences unfortunate events, he does his best to conceal the harsh reality and replaces the truth with a happier illusion.